

THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS
ON THE
EDUCATION QUESTION,

FOUNDED ON PERSONAL OBSERVATION.

BY
A FOREIGNER.

INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
ON THE ATTAINMENT OF THE DEGREES OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AND MASTER OF ARTS,

At the University of Rostock,

BY
HENRY F. F. SCHAEFER, PH.D., A.M., F.E.I.S.,

Master of Modern Languages, Madras College, St. Andrews.

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THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS

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EDUCATION QUESTION.

WITH reference to Education Britain stands in a very strange position at this present moment. A widely felt necessity to educate the lower classes in order to prevent a possible calamity from the increase—I might almost say preponderance—of political power given into their hands, struggling with old-fashioned ideas, deeply rooted prejudices, and, I am afraid, a strenuous effort, hidden under an apparently sincere desire for the welfare of the nation at large, to grasp the supremacy in the management of the engine that is to raise the level of average national knowledge and intellectual development to an equality, at least, with those of other nations.

Royal Commissions have gathered an enormous mass of information for the guidance of the Legislature, and, after years of wrangling and empirical attempts at amelioration, there seems at last a prospect of something tangible being done to amend a crying evil.

Whether the national want—or rather the knowledge of it—be sufficiently intense to remove political party prejudices, to overcome obstacles thrown in the way by those now possessing the advantages and the power a superior education confers, and unwilling to lose them, to clear away the mist enveloping the ideas of Religion and Ecclesiasticism, and whether—should the Educational Bill pass in substantially the form which it

seems likely to assume—the local Committees, *anxious to buy in the cheapest markets*, will not cause the new-born babe to die of inanition by starving the nurses, remains to be seen.

A tempest of some kind appears imminent, but whether it will be a little one followed by a long continued rain of small measures, or a great one clearing away all the vapours, political, intellectual, and moral, that have long enveloped the question of Education in Britain, and leaving behind a clear and invigorating atmosphere such as men love to breathe and to work in, it were difficult to prognosticate.

In the midst of this preparation for the coming struggle, the impression produced upon a Foreigner by the present state of Education in England and Scotland—more especially the latter—may not be altogether uninteresting to read.

Though a Foreigner be prepared, by reading and converse with travellers, to find England very different from his native land, the reality very generally far exceeds his expectation.

He finds England the very home of contrasts. Immense wealth beside abject poverty; a most comprehensive system of relief for the poor—and people dying of hunger and wretchedness; High Church dignitaries with princely incomes—and curates merely sustaining existence upon a pittance—and other strange contrasts, which to mention would lead me too far from my present purpose—give him food for curious speculation. He looks about him for some explanation of these anomalies, and the sight of a country possessing rich *so-called national* endowments, from the enjoyment of which large portions of the nation are excluded, of a country with noble schools for the education of those whose parents are deserving but needy, attended by the sons of those who need no assistance whatever, &c. &c. puzzles him more and more. He begins to wonder where that practical good sense without theorising, of which the Englishman is so proud, and for the want of which he pities the Foreigner, can be, and he ends by first doubting, then disbelieving, his pre-eminence in that quality. He becomes convinced that the Englishman owes

the advantages he actually enjoys, and which he ascribes to the inherent possession of the aforementioned quality, much more to the geographical position of his country.

Since the twin-suns—the Reformation and the art of Printing—penetrated the thick veil of ignorance that covered Europe like a pall, and gradually lifted it from the nations, there has been a continual struggle between power and ignorance on the one side, and freedom and enlightenment on the other. In England liberty obtained a footing much sooner than abroad, and was able to work its way to power and universal acknowledgment without being opposed by a combination of antagonists. Abroad two elements inherent in the geographical position of the various states checked and arrested for short periods the steady onward march of freedom and intellectual development. These were—1. The necessity of concentrating the military power of the land in one hand for purposes of national defence; and, 2. The facility with which despotism has been able to obtain foreign aid against triumphant liberty at home.

There are several periods in English history when, the careful student will admit, England's position among nations was—to say the least—in jeopardy. But she escaped the calamity of invasion through her inaccessibility, and reaped the benefit of a political atmosphere purified by storms that desolated the Continent. England has therefore been able to pursue her social and intellectual development comparatively undisturbed. The social and political commotions that have now and then ruffled the even surface of her home-life, compared with the revolutions in France, are but as the smart vivifying breeze compared with the fierce hurricane or the blasting sirocco. Safe from the vengeance of foreign conquerors, she has been the refuge of persecuted intellect and patriotism; possessing a coast open at every point and at every season, she has more thoroughly than any other nation enjoyed the blessing of commercial intercourse with other peoples—the most powerful secular agent Providence employs for the teaching of man.

For these reasons, England ought to be nationally—not individually by great statesmen, great soldiers, great sailors, &c. but nationally—in her people, in the bulk of her inhabitants—the most enlightened, the most liberal, the most educated nation under heaven.

Does she occupy this lofty position? My opportunities of observation in England have been too limited to enable me to say much about her school education; but the strictures that have, of late years, been passed upon her Public Schools and Universities, charging them with being behind the age, &c. seem to imply that they have fallen short of the standard the writers of those strictures had fixed—a standard mostly, I may say always, regulated by the condition of foreign institutions of similar position and importance. And that the state of culture among the lower classes is nearly as low as it can be, admits of hardly a doubt. The thousands whom their crosses and marks as signatures to marriage, baptismal, and other registers prove unable to write, and whom trials in courts of justice, visits of missionaries, and other agencies discover unable to read—prove it. The class sometimes called “the intelligent artizan class” can hardly be much more enlightened; whence otherwise the complaints of employers that they are unable to introduce improved processes and machinery to compete with the foreigner, either because of the ignorance of their workpeople to use them, or because of their still greater ignorance in opposing their introduction? Whence the complaints of tradesmen that their journeymen can only work in their accustomed groove, and are useless out of it? Whence the strikes for wages that destroy capital or drive it into other and foreign channels? Whence are these things, if not from ignorance in general, and special ignorance of the most fundamental laws of political economy.

The sister kingdom, Scotland, to some extent participates in the geographical advantages of England, but she has always been much poorer and a frequent sufferer by the proximity of her more powerful neighbour. Notwithstanding these disad-

vantages, a love of learning showed itself very early among her people, and found its highest expression in the system of schools established by Knox. This system—which, however, was never quite completed in its educational progression from Parish School through Burgh School to University—secured for Scotland a proud position among the educated nations of Europe—a position which an extension of the system in conformity with the advancing requirements of the times would have enabled her to maintain. Instead of extending it, however, in proportion to the increase of wealth and population, of altering it in keeping with the changing requirements of the age, the system has remained comparatively stationary, allowing other countries to outstrip Scotland in the race for knowledge and a higher intellectual development in spite of the mental vigour in which she is admitted to abound. She has indeed produced great men in nearly every intellectual pursuit, but I consider this merely as a proof of the native ability I admit, and I find proof for my idea regarding the insufficiency of educational means in the fact that most Scotch geniuses have sought their highest development in England or abroad.

The period which has elapsed since the termination of the Napoleonic wars has been throughout Europe signalised by a more than usually rapid development of the human mind, and, on the Continent, of the means of cultivating it. The energy of England has been mostly spent in class-struggles for political supremacy, and in efforts for the extension of her commercial prosperity. The naturally more metaphysical energy of Scotland found a vent in subtle speculations on religious matters, which led to disputes and quarrels far exceeding in bitterness the political strife of England, and left a spirit of hostility pervading the mind of the nation that has effectually prevented a combined action in the matter of physical, intellectual, and moral education; a matter affecting the welfare of the nation at large, and not necessarily or by nature connected with denominational or ecclesiastical questions. Admitting the mischievous influence exerted by religious

dissensions, there remain other hurtful agents, seldom mentioned. Among these the rapid increase of wealth through comparatively non-intellectual means, such as the finding of gold deposits in the colonies, &c. deserves a bad *pre-eminence*, tending to convince uneducated minds that their summum bonum—*money*—is to be acquired without learning, and that the time required to obtain the latter would be lost.

The Parish Schools—the very foundation of Knox's educational edifice—have naturally suffered most by the before-mentioned religious contentions, as they were under the control and management of the Established Church, and probably considered by the Dissenters as establishments calculated to disseminate ideas contrary to their views. This led to the erection of schools in connection with the most influential of the dissenting bodies, thus, in many places, causing two men to fritter away their teaching power upon the same variety of subjects; whereas they might have divided the work between them, and, by concentrating their attention upon the half, have greatly improved its quality for the benefit of the pupils. In localities where the small number of pupils made such a division of labour impossible, the erection of a second school tended only to make two men very poor where one might have been pretty comfortable.

Wealth also dealt unintended but severe blows at the Parochial Teacher by the building of large and well-endowed schools—many of them from motives of vanity, or to ride a hobby—where education may be obtained at as cheap a rate, and of a better quality, through the division of labour made possible by larger numbers and better emoluments. By education much above the class whose equal he is in point of income, the Parochial Teacher has become a more and more solitary being; by being deprived of the means to cultivate society, he has become more and more unfit for it—he has lost the tinsel that passes for gold in it.

The relative position of the Minister and the Teacher, in country parishes chiefly, is also injurious and unfair.

Although I entirely admit that a Minister's is a high and noble profession, yet I think it must be acknowledged that Providence has seen fit to place the result of his labour less directly within his own power and control than it has a Teacher's. The result of a Teacher's labour is more visible; the material he moulds is more pliable, and retains the impression for life. A Teacher's work is more definite, and infinitely less liable to be affected by a change of public opinion—a change frequently inducing ridicule and contempt of individuals. For these reasons I conceive a Teacher's influence to be greater. Add to this the necessity forced upon a Teacher of daily widening the basis of his knowledge and adding to its height, whilst Ministers rarely continue their studies, except in so far as they are necessary for the composition of sermons, and rapidly lose at least the readiness and certainty of what they have acquired at College, and, I feel convinced, it will be found that the relative position of a Parish Minister and a Parish Teacher is not what it ought to be.

The partial or complete emancipation of the *Burgh Schools* from clerical control has been a boon to the Teacher in a small way only, for as the Clergymen are always men of a more or less liberal education, their influence has been very often exerted for good. The government of these schools has gradually fallen into the hands of the Town-Councils, which, since the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, consist, with extremely few exceptions, of a preponderating number of ignorant and uncultivated men, who despise, or pretend to despise, learning because they have none, and who cannot bear to see men of their own appointing occupy superior social positions. Even the honest and straightforward among them, who are uninfluenced by envy and spite, are, by their want of education, incapacitated from understanding the necessities of cultivated minds—*i.e.* of minds such as are required for the fulfilment of the very duties they ought to desire to see satisfactorily performed—the necessities—not luxuries—of books, associates, society, travels, &c.

The influence of the Town-Councils on their schools has been, in short, mostly either null and void or worse. Had there been such a rule among the Teachers of those institutions as obtains in most governing bodies, of the majority carrying any measure over the heads of the minority, the non-efficiency or obtrusiveness of Town-Councils would have done little harm. As it is, the efficiency maintained and the results obtained, in spite of disunion within and attacks from without, by withdrawal of salaries and imposition of burdens, is perfectly marvellous and highly creditable to the Teachers themselves.

The highest educational Seminaries, the Universities, appear to a Foreigner a mass of teaching power heterogeneously thrown together. They do, in some cases at least, school work, and do it often in a slovenly, unsystematic way. Students being admitted to some classes with the most elementary knowledge, many others are condemned to one or two years of comparative idleness at a time of life most open to the cultivation of bad habits. A system prevails of leaving the preparation of the University work largely to the inclination of the students without any pressure on the part of the Professors—a system well enough adapted to the grown-up men who once almost solely attended the Universities, but not to the class of which the majority of first year's students at present consists. It is true that bad certificates and disgraceful failure are the frequent punishment of neglect in attendance and slovenliness in work, but even this does not rectify the matter, as such entire responsibility ought not to be thrown, if at all avoidable, upon any one so young. The control and disposal of the teaching power seems also very necessary. I know of one Professor who draws his salary and has no classes at all, and, so far as I know, does not particularly wish them; of another who is anxious to have classes and cannot get them because, as he avers, the subject he professes is not necessary for passing the final examination; of another who loves not the chair he fills, and seeks con-

solation for an adverse fate in philosophy and the sweet realms of poetry ; of another profoundly learned and intensely laborious, but whose teaching is more adapted to the lecture-room of Universities, such as they ought to be, than to the class-room of Universities, such as they are. These gleanings have been collected during a few months of observation only. I might have added a large amount of information gathered from books written upon the subject, but abstained in order not to invalidate the title of this essay.

To amend the general looseness and want of system described in the foregoing pages, various methods have been tried in schools, some of them ingeniously adapted to produce the reverse of the desired results.

The constant examinations by Inspectors, for instance, and the payment of subsidies to the teachers according to the results obtained at such examinations, have introduced a system of instruction which sends children from school full of undigested information which they lose in the course of a couple of years at furthest.

The monitorial system, which was proclaimed to produce splendid results at very small expense, has been immensely overrated and egregiously misapplied. A first-rate mathematical teacher has assured me that he has unsuccessfully tried to apply it to the teaching of the principles of mathematics and arithmetic, but that he has found it of great use in the practical part of those sciences, in those parts in which a certain result obtained is a proof of correct working. This statement strengthened a previous conviction of mine to the same effect. In the mere ascertaining whether pupils have committed certain lessons faithfully to memory, the system may also be applied ; whilst in all those studies that require the gradual cultivation of the ear and the taste, and the constant repetition of the same set of rules in an infinite variety of forms, it is worse than useless. In the teaching of English reading, in which this system is most diligently applied, I hold it to be particularly injurious, and one of the

chief causes of the perpetuation of a broad Scotch accent. I have heard teachers instruct their monitors in well-pronounced English, and the monitors conveying the information to their classes in a very adulterated form, sometimes little better than the vernacular of the district.

I could multiply cases of the absurd or exaggerated application of the system, but it is so fast going down the hill that it is hardly worth while to accelerate its pace.

Some people, chiefly of a class with strong economical tendencies, have invented another method of producing effective teaching. Having persuaded themselves, and unfortunately others also, that the machine is in very fair working order, and that all deficiencies are ascribable to the engineer, they have bethought themselves to spur him on to greater exertions by withdrawing supplies in the shape of salary, and making him entirely dependent upon his fees. This method is most ingeniously contrived to punish conscientious teachers for their honesty. If a teacher be incapable for any reason whatsoever to teach a pupil, without seriously wasting the time of the rest of the class, it becomes his imperative duty to get rid of him. The conscientious teacher will do so, to his pecuniary loss; the unconscientious teacher will not, to the loss of his other pupils. Some teachers compromise the matter with their conscience in a strange way. They allow the pupil in question to sit at the foot of the class, and do absolutely nothing; they take his fees, and, in some cases, I do believe actually think themselves honest.

Besides these more or less absurd or mean attempts to obtain a larger amount of knowledge for the rising generation, other more honest and intelligent endeavours have been made, not only to procure more knowledge, but also to adapt it to the requirements of the times. But such desultory efforts cannot meet the exigency of the case. Nothing but thoroughly sweeping measures of reform will avail—measures which bring the Elementary Schools, the Intermediate Schools, and the Universities into proper correspondence and harmony.

But though a good scientific and learned education is most desirable for the middle and upper classes, yet it does not seem so vitally important as the universal spread of intelligence and elementary education among the lower stratum of society—and this, I believe, is not to be obtained except by making attendance at school compulsory. Why the compulsory clause is to be struck out of the Bill expected to be presented to the British Parliament, I cannot comprehend. It can surely not be in deference to the old argument that such a clause would be an unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the subject, for all liberty is clearly but a compromise, and means only that we may do what we please so long as we do not injure our neighbours. The Factory Act, the Vaccination Act, the Nuisance Removal and Cattle Disease Regulations are all equally, or in a greater degree, infringements of the liberty of the subject; but they are approved, because the good they do and the harm they prevent are self-evident. These measures are intended to increase physical wellbeing, and to prevent the spread of disease—benefits quickly appreciated by the lower classes, and have met with very little opposition. Do the Legislature consider the depth of ignorance even among the so-called better classes so great as to be afraid to introduce a clause which will be of such immense benefit to the poorest and most forlorn class in the land?

The effectiveness of education as an agent in the prevention of crime may be fairly argued from the results obtained by the introduction of Reformatory Schools. This observation leads me to another truly British anomaly—viz. honest boys and girls are allowed to grow up savages, but little rogues have the blessings of education thrust upon them.

That the offer of a free education, however, will not overcome the cupidity or indifference of parents, is amply demonstrated by the large number of schools that have made this offer unsuccessfully for years, and by the hordes of ragged urchins that infest the larger cities.

One of the strongest possible arguments as to the propriety

or impropriety, the justice or injustice, of forcing anything whatever upon the young, may, I think, be drawn from the consideration whether they, when they have come to riper years, will complain of such an enforcement or rejoice at it.

It is easy to imagine a man complaining that his father's will has forced him into a profession or trade for which he felt no inclination or aptitude ; it is easy to believe that a woman may complain of having been forced, or even allowed, to spend years at music for which she had neither talent nor taste, and of having been left in comparative or total ignorance of many things that would have added to her pleasure and comfort ; but who can imagine anyone complaining of having been snatched from bodily disease and infirmity by cleanliness and physical training—from mental and moral degradation by intellectual and moral education ?

If a complete system of schools were established in which certain compulsory branches only were taught, and in which these branches were given free, as I think they undoubtedly ought to be, but in which the children were obliged to appear thoroughly clean and tidy, however poorly clad, there would still remain a large number of children whose parents are either unwilling or unable to supply them with the necessary food and clothing. These poor unfortunates have hardly a chance of escape from vice and degradation. Would it not be a great blessing to them, and a boon to the whole country, if they were gathered into large establishments situated in thoroughly healthy localities, such, for instance, as the Highlands of Scotland, where they would thrive physically, and might be kept under proper mental and moral training. At the proper age, those boys whose inclination tended that way—and the proportion would not be small—might be sent to naval depôts to be trained as seamen ; the rest might be taught a trade and at the same time drilled in military exercises, in which nearly all boys delight. They should be regularly apprenticed to the trade they choose, and at the end of their apprenticeship the choice might be placed before them of following up their trade or of

enlisting in the army. I have no doubt a great number would choose the latter, and thus help to solve a problem of daily increasing difficulty. The girls might be kept in their school up to about 12 years of age, and then employed till about 16 years of age as servants in both schools and in hospitals, or in the manufacture of many articles at present contracted for by Government. After such superintendence from childhood they would, of course, be far better fitted to lead useful and honest lives than they otherwise can be.

Such and similar plans, added to the saving to be effected in prisons and reformatories, would go a considerable way to meet the most utilitarian and niggardly view, by nearly balancing the outlay and the saving, setting aside altogether the far nobler view of the good to be done.

Other schools, in which the ordinary branches of a liberal education are superadded to the compulsory branches, would next be required. For these additional subjects fees should be charged. I think that no children attending the compulsory branches only should be admitted to these schools, except perhaps as a reward of superior merit, and then gratis to all the branches taught.

But the mere establishment of such schools would not secure the desired advance in the knowledge of the young. The internal management of them would require to be greatly different from that which now exists in Scotch schools. The principle of promotion by periodical examinations would need to be introduced and strictly adhered to. It greatly economises time and teaching power, and ensures the utmost possible development of every pupil's ability. The system at present in operation at nearly all the Scotch schools of advancing pupils according to time of attendance is glaringly absurd, and *most* injurious to the *very best* pupils. If 50 pupils begin—let us say—French together, there is among them, according to the system now in use, not only a large variety of talent, but also a great disparity of age. I have, in more than one class, known the age of the pupils to vary from 11 to 19 years.

The rate of progress is naturally very different, and during the latter part of a session the upper half of the class is reduced to a wearisome listening to explanations and questions they have heard and answered till thinking about them is almost impossible. This state of matters, which every teacher will admit to be but too common, is very exhausting to the master, causing an unnecessary waste of physical energy in giving a fictitious interest to the oft-repeated lesson, and leading to habits of inattention—to say the least—on the part of the most promising pupils. Advancement into higher classes by periodical examinations at moderate intervals would obviate all this, and would give talented and stupid pupils an equal chance of making the best of their gifts. To fix a certain amount of acquirement as necessary for admission into any class is theoretically the best plan, but it presents some practical difficulties. A class, for instance, might be left nearly empty by a large number being advanced out of it and very few admitted into it. The practically best plan, and the most easily grafted upon the present system, seems to continue the methods of marking in present use, and to advance periodically a certain proportion of the scholars—say a third. It is true *one* year's pupils might be better than *another's*, but the difference of knowledge would not be so great as to impede the progress of the class, and every pupil would have found his true position before he passed through all the classes of which such a school would consist.

A curriculum, strictly followed, must be the necessary adjunct—indeed forerunner—of such an arrangement. But this need by no means force any pupils to devote time and labour to subjects his parents or guardians do not desire. The curriculum could be so framed as to allow for the different requirements of a merchant or a professional man, and the system of promotion I have endeavoured to explain would allow a more advantageous pursuit of any special branch than any other.

These Intermediate Schools would, I feel convinced, force

upon the Universities many reforms they need. The scholars such schools would produce would free the Professors of Latin, Greek, and Mathematics from the drudgery, and sometimes elementary teaching, to which they are condemned, and of which they have often complained in their writings and speeches. But this is a subject upon which it is not my purpose at present to enlarge.

I cannot, however, close these remarks without adverting to a grievance which weighs heavily upon the parents of pupils. I allude to the prodigious variety of school books. In a country with so eminently a migratory population, the use of different books in almost every school leads to an enormous waste of money. In many houses I have seen heaps of books, half used or almost new, accumulated from this cause. A commission would of course settle the text-books to be employed in any *new* system of education; but is it necessary to wait for an Education Bill to remove this grievance? Might not Government take the initiative by publishing a list of well-selected text books to be used in the various examinations for Government appointments. This would help a great deal to save the money of the parents and the time and patience of the pupils. It would also remove from these examinations the variety of grammatical terminology which often puzzles the candidates, and the knowledge of which is so useless that the time spent in its acquisition is little better than wasted.

A long residence in Britain, and a lively interest in her welfare, has made me desirous to add something to the educational edifice about to be erected. If I have in any measure whatever contributed to its symmetrical proportions, I shall rejoice; if not, I shall find comfort in having acted up to Nelson's noble words, that

“England expects every man to do his duty!”

